

Air Quality Ontario

MORE INTENSIVE AIR QUALITY MONITORING

NEW TWO-LEVEL SMOG ALERT

From May 1 to September 30, traditionally the peak "smog season", the ministry provides:

- a two-tier air quality forecast that gives up to three days' notice when poor air quality is predicted
- direct e-mail smog alerts for anyone who subscribes to the ministry's new smog alert network
- a Web site that provides air quality readings, air quality forecasts and information on actions that can be taken when a smog alert is called, www.airqualityontario.com
- air quality updates as often as six times a day from Monday to Friday, and three times a day on weekends
- air quality data for nine additional communities, largely in rural southwestern Ontario and high growth areas in the Greater Toronto Area, bringing the total to 27 communities across Ontario
- smog watches and smog advisories for smaller geographic forecast areas than in the past.

On May 1, 2000, the Ministry of the

Environment launched its new Air Quality Ontario initiative, to provide better and more timely air quality information to the Ontario public.

New, two-level smog alert

When air quality and weather conditions are likely to produce smog, the Ministry of the Environment takes steps to inform the public, and to warn the most vulnerable members of society about the situation.

The enhanced smog alert program provides two levels of alert:

Level 1 – Smog watch

When the ministry issues a smog watch, there is at least a 50 per cent probability that smog conditions will occur within the next three days.

Level 2 – Smog advisory

When the ministry issues a smog advisory, there is a high probability of a smog day occurring within the next 24 hours. In this event, everyone, including all levels of government, industries, businesses and residents, will be encouraged to lower smog-causing emissions, and people will be advised to avoid unnecessary exposure to smog. When the air clears, the ministry will issue a termination notice.

The facts about smog

Smog is a mixture of ground-level ozone, toxic gases and airborne particles that can damage both human health and the environment.

The contaminants that create smog are released during the combustion of fossil fuels in our vehicles, power plants, factory boilers and

homes. They are also released by industrial processes, the evaporation of liquid fuels and the use of solvents and other volatile products such as oil-based paints.

Ontario's smog problems are caused by a combination of local emissions and pollutants carried by the wind from pollution sources in the United States. More than half our smog problem comes from south of the border.

Ontario's air quality has improved steadily since 1988, but many communities still get a number of smog days each year.

Air Quality Index readings can range from 0 to over 100. Categories: 0 to 15 very good, 16 to 31 good, 32 to 49 moderate, 50 to 99 poor and 100+ very poor.

How to get air quality information

Via radio and television: The ministry has worked for many years with news media across Ontario to inform the public about smog conditions. This will continue to be a crucial method for communicating smog information. You can expect your local radio and television stations to add smog watches and smog advisories to their weather forecasts.

On the Internet: www.airqualityontario.com
As part of its Air Quality Ontario initiative, the Ministry of the Environment has launched a new air quality Web site. The site provides current Air Quality Index (AQI) readings and air quality forecasts, as well as information on actions that can be taken when a smog alert is issued.

Visitors to the new Web site are invited to join the ministry's smog alert network. Anyone subscribing to this free on-line service will receive an automatic e-mail whenever the ministry issues a smog watch or smog advisory.

By telephone: You can get AQI readings from recorded telephone messages by dialing 416-246-0411 or 1-800-387-7768 (toll-free).

Further information

For general enquiries about Ontario's Air Quality Index, call 416-235-6051, or send an e-mail to officeaq@ene.gov.on.ca.

The Ministry of the Environment's Web site is at www.ene.gov.on.ca. You can reach the Ministry's Public Information Centre by dialing 1-800-565-4923 (toll-free) or 416-325-4000 (in Toronto).

The strong and continuing dedication to cleaner air shown by the Ontario Lung Association has contributed greatly to the development of the Air Quality Ontario initiative.

